

COMRADES TO THE POLLS: THE SOVIET ELECTIONS

THE BALTIC REPUBLICS

1. LITHUANIA
Supreme Soviet legislative election: Feb. 24
Population: 3.7 million
Ethnic breakdown: 80 percent Lithuanian

2. LATVIA
Supreme Soviet election: March 18
Population: 2.7 million
Ethnic breakdown: 50 percent Latvian

3. ESTONIA
Supreme Soviet election: March 18
Population: 1.6 million
Ethnic breakdown: 62 percent Estonian

THE WEST
4. UKRAINE
Supreme Soviet election: March 4
Population: 51.7 million
Ethnic breakdown: 73 percent Ukrainian

5. BYELORUSSIA
Supreme Soviet elections: March 4
Population: 10.2 million
Ethnic breakdown: 78 percent Byelorussian

6. MOLDAVIA
Supreme Soviet elections: Feb. 25
Population: 4.3 million
Ethnic breakdown: 63 percent Moldavian

THE TRANSCAUCASUS
7. GEORGIA
Supreme Soviet elections: June 17 (provisional date)
Population: 5.4 million
Ethnic breakdown: 70 percent Georgian

8. AZERBAIJAN
Supreme Soviet elections: date not announced
Population: 7 million
Ethnic breakdown: 85 percent Azerbaijani

9. ARMENIA
Supreme Soviet elections: date not announced
Population: 3.3 million
Ethnic breakdown: 94 percent Armenian



THE BALTIC REPUBLICS

In all three Baltic republics, annexed by the Soviet Union in 1940 under a secret pact with Nazi Germany, the strongest political forces are the pro-independence Popular Front movements formed in the fall of 1988. Candidates endorsed by the Estonian and Latvian popular fronts, and Sajudis in Lithuania, are likely to win overwhelming support from the native population. The Russian minority in each republic is politically divided, with some expressing sympathy for the popular fronts and others backing "interfront" groups that campaign against local autonomy.

In Lithuania, which is ethnically homogeneous, Sajudis-sponsored candidates are likely to win an overwhelming majority in the new Supreme Soviet. The Lithuanian Communist Party has endorsed the goal of independence and formed a working alliance with Sajudis. A pro-independence majority is also likely in the Estonian Supreme Soviet. In Latvia, the result hinges on how many Russian voters are prepared to vote for pro-independence popular front candidates.

THE WEST

The electoral contest is between the Communist Party bureaucracy and popular front movements that burst onto the political scene last year. The popular front movements are likely to do well in regions where they have been able to register their candidates. But the Communist Party apparatus still controls rural areas and regions with a heavy concentration of ethnic Russians such as the eastern Ukraine and western Moldavia.

The Ukrainian popular front, known as Rukh, is particularly strong in western Ukraine which was only incorporated into the Soviet Union during World War II. It hopes to win 30 to 35 percent of the seats in the new Ukrainian parliament. The Byelorussian popular front is favored by about 25 percent of voters, according to informal polls. The Moldavian popular front, which advocates long-term reunification with neighboring Romania, is supported by a majority of Moldavians but has little backing among the minority Russian and Gagauz populations.

THE TRANSCAUCAZUS

The Transcaucasus—the region beyond the Caucasus mountains—has become a hotbed of nationalist sentiment. The standing of local Communist Party authorities is lower than anywhere else in the Soviet Union after two years of military clampdowns and curfews. In free elections, the party would probably be eliminated as a serious political force in all three republics. Local authorities have used political instability and continuing ethnic clashes as a pretext for postponing elections until at least the summer.

Nationalist movements command the loyalties of an overwhelming majority of the population in the three republics. The nationalists are, however, divided over whether to participate in the elections. The Armenian National Movement boycotted last year's elections for the new Soviet parliament. Georgian nationalist organizations have also called for a boycott of June's elections on grounds that Georgia's incorporation into the Soviet Union in 1921, following its conquest by the Red Army, was illegal.

CENTRAL ASIA

The Moslem republics of Central Asia are widely viewed as strongholds of reaction. Over the past year, informal citizens' movements have sprung up in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, but their influence is largely confined to the big cities. The countryside remains firmly under the control of the Communist Party apparatus. After elections in Turkmenistan last month, the local justice minister boasted that there were no informal groups in the republic.

Participation in the Uzbekistan elections last Sunday was reported to be 93.5 percent, almost as high as during the days of semi-compulsory voting. Communist Party loyalists took at least two-thirds of the seats in the republic's parliament, with the remainder going to independent intellectuals and political activists. In neighboring Kazakhstan, site of the Soviet Union's main nuclear testing ground, environmental issues are expected to play an important role in the March 25 election.

RUSSIA

Populist hero Boris Yeltsin has signaled his intention to campaign for the presidency of the Russian Federation, the largest of the 15 Soviet republics. Informal polls suggest that the former Moscow Communist Party chief is almost certain to be elected a deputy in the Russian parliament from his Ural Mountains hometown, Sverdlovsk. Whether he will become president of Russia—which he could turn into a high-profile and powerful post—will depend on the balance of forces in the new Supreme Soviet.

Progressives and radical reformists supporting Yeltsin will do well in big cities, including Moscow and Leningrad, and informal polls suggest they will win 20 to 30 percent of the total vote. The Communist Party apparatus is likely to control the rural vote and will be able to rely on about 20 percent of the new deputies. Candidates campaigning on Russian nationalist themes could win about 10 percent of the vote. The balance of power is likely to be held by nonaligned deputies, such as factory managers and workers, who campaigned as individuals.